

More than a Conference:

Reflections on RPNC

by Nakisha Renée

Class of 2016

The following reflection describes Nakisha Renée's experience at the Race & Pedagogy National Conference (RPNC) in 2014 along with her experience during the most recent 2018 RPNC.



The lessons of the Race and Pedagogy National Conference reverberate in the Puget Sound campus, the city of Tacoma, and across the nation as participants travel back home bringing the rich learning and teachings alongside their luggage.

My biggest appreciation is the continued education the conference embeds in our community. I had been graced to perform at the conference in 2014 as a student, and recently to share the stage again in 2018 as an alumna.

I am grateful for the memories: the months of research shown through student posters, the intersections of race and science with Dr. Henry Louis Gates Jr in 2014, the First Nation pursuits with chairman Brian Cladoosby in 2018, and the array of art, plays, music and poetry.

What I continue to marvel at, as an alumna of the University of Puget Sound's class of 2016, is the way that the Race and Pedagogy National Conference has shown up in many dimensions of my everyday life beyond college.

I recall the lessons I learned from the great Dr. Thelma Jackson on the prison industrial complex and the school to prison pipeline as I tutor elementary age students with hopes that their third grade reading scores will not predict a juvenile record.

While I'm serving the homeless population of Seattle, I recant the teachings of the revolutionary Angela Davis as she exposed the exploitation of capitalism and patriarchy in 2014.

I draw on the courage of Dr. Michael Benitez, remembering his artistic performance of 2018, whenever I step on stage to express myself or advocate for those who are marginalized or silenced.

When I'm educating my coworkers about the life of being a black female and it begins to feel like I'm defending my right to exist in corporate America, I remember the 2018 session with Alicia Garza and Patrisse Cullors from Black Lives Matter. I remember again not to be tokenized, not to be sensationalized, and not to be minimized to just two aspects of my identity.

I depend on the histories and narratives of my ancestors that are lost in daily public and private school curriculum.

Where would I have learned this beyond the walls of the Race and Pedagogy Institute?

The conference has given me the knowledge and tools to live, aspire and strive in the 21st century. It has been the link between my education and my lived experiences.

And for all who are looking to attend in 2022, do not let the conference trick you into thinking the sessions are free for students and scholarship holders. There is no such thing as a free session. Each has the cost of rattling your worldview and evolving your consciousness into a new state of oneness and wholeness with humanity.

Nakisha Renée is a recent graduate from the University of Puget Sound with a double major in Business Leadership: Finance Emphasis, and Communication Studies; and a double minor in Economics and African American Studies. In the future, she plans to earn a dual degree JD/MBA in Tax Law. In her activism and poetry, she advocates for those in society whose voices have been silenced over time or who have forgotten the strength in sharing their own stories. Nakisha Renée is passionate about law and financial literacy, knowing that our society cannot attain true justice without economic justice. As she continues her career in corporate finance, she has her sights set on creating a community resource center that will provide resources and opportunities to the homeless and those with criminal backgrounds.
